DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 328 604 TM 016 135

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TITLE	The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	American Institutes for Research, Washington, DC.; ERIC Clearinghouse on Tests, Measurement, and Evaluation, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-TM-90-2
PUB DATE	Dec 90
CONTRACT	RI88062003
NOTE	4p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Agency Role; *Educational Assessment; Educational Policy; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Information Dissemination; *International Organizations; International Studies; Organizational Objectives; *Private Agencies; *Research Projects; Statistical Analysis; Test Construction
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests; *International Assn Evaluation Educ Achievement

ABSTRACT

This digest examines the organization of and international studies conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The IEA is a non-profit, private association that conducts international comparative studies on schools and aids the research community in developing international tests and statistical techniques. The IEA has 39 member countries. Policy makers and educators use IEA data to assess alternative curricula, monitor the quality of schooling worldwide, identify effective schools and determine ways of improving their own educational systems, and improve their understanding of the instructional learning process. The organizational structure of IEA consists of a chairperson, general assembly, six-member standing committee, and secretariat. Specific studies are managed by specially appointed steering committees and implemented by national centers. IEA studies include a decennial assessment of a core of school studies in math, science, reading literacy, composition, and foreign languages. Other studies include: a 35-country reading literacy study; the third international mathematics and science study; school and teacher resource assessments that focus on opportunity-to-learn indicators; longitudinal and in-depth case studies; a 21-country computer education study; and a 13-country study of pre-primary early childhood care and education. In the area of information dissemination, the IEA publishes bulletins, a semiannual newsletter, and a guidebook on the IEA research network; the IEA also sponsors conferences on issue-related topics. A 4-item list of additional reading materials is included. (TJH)

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE EVALUATION OF EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

by Bill Loxley, IEA

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The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement

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"U.S. Students Continue to Lag Behind Japanese and Europeans in Math and Science"

When you read a newspaper headline like this one, chances are that the findings are based on data from studies conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

This digest takes a look at IEA -- how it is organized and how international studies are undertaken. Some current IEA projects are also described.

What Is IEA?

Formed 31 years ago, IEA is a non-profit, private association which carries out international comparative studies on schools.

Policy makers and educators use data from IEA studies to

- assess the impact of alternative curricular offerings,
- monitor the quality of schooling worldwide,
- identify effective schools and learn how to improve their own educational systems, and
- better understand the instructional learning process.

IEA aids the research community in developing international test instruments and statistical techniques. IEA data are available to researchers around the world.

By viewing the world as a giant laboratory, IEA tries to encourage international dialogue focusing on policy matters and technical evaluation procedures. The resulting debate blends issue-oriented conceptual frameworks with unique cultural situations.

How Is IEA Organized?

IEA's organizational structure consists of the following:

- a **chairperson**, who is elected by the membership every three years;
- a **general assembly**, which meets once a year to formally approve an agenda and debate procedural and technical issues that concern IEA's goals and professional development;
- a six-member **standing committee** (two members are elected yearly on a rotating basis), which meets twice yearly with the chairperson and executive director to implement the decisions of the General Assembly;
- a **secretariat**, located in The Hague, which carries out IEA's day-to-day activities.

Each time an international study is undertaken, IEA appoints an International Coordinating Center (ICC) and steering committee to manage the instrument development, piloting, data collection, and analysis tasks. National centers for each participating country are designated and their representatives meet periodically at the invitation of the ICC to plan timetables; data handling procedures; and staff training in sampling, item construction and analysis, and report writing.

IEA currently has 39 member countries. New members are accepted into IEA based on a two-thirds majority vote of assembly members.

Full-voting membership is open to national institutions with ties to both the research community and funding agencies -- usually a Ministry of Education, public or private university, or national research institute. Typically, a full-voting member represents an entire nation, although it is possible for an institution to represent an educational system of a province or state

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within a nation. Non-voting institutional observer memberships are available for a fee.

What Kinds of Studies Does IEA Undertake?

Every decade or so, IEA undertakes a core of school studies in math, science, reading literacy, composition, and foreign language. A typical study involves 20 countries and includes testing national samples in a given subject, accompanied by individual student, teacher, and school questionnaires. The surveyed students are usually 9 or 10, 13 or 14, and 17 or 18 years old.

Aside from a 35 country reading literacy study operating from Hamburg, Germany, IEA is now preparing for its third international mathematics and science study. This study, which begins field research in 1993, will involve over 25 countries.

The scope of IEA research includes thousands of randomly sampled students by grade level in hundreds of schools and at least two classrooms per grade within a school. When all questionnaire data are merged into one file, it is possible to evaluate the impact of school and teacher resources on student achievement after controlling for varying student characteristics.

Besides measures of school and teacher resources and process variables that measure how well teachers teach, IEA uses opportunity-to-learn measures that indicate whether students have been given the chance to study a certain topic. Indicators of the opportunity to learn for a country measure the qualities of a curriculum while achievement scores measure the actual results.

In addition, IEA offers longitudinal components and in-depth case studies on specific sub-samples (for example, classroom processes, performance testing) as possible options that nations can choose when they select the grade levels they want to study.

What Special Studies Does IEA Undertake?

Aside from the four recurring studies, other smaller international studies are undertaken periodically as needs arise. Current examples include:

- a 21-country, computer education study that looks at how computer technology is changing school instruction. The participating countries are Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Finland, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Holland, Hungary, Hong Kong, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Portugal, Singapore, Switzerland, and U.S.A.

- a 13-country study that examines pre-primary early child care and education services to learn what is happening to young children worldwide before they enter the formal school setting. The participating countries are Belgium, China, Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, Hong Kong, Hungary, Italy, Kenya, Nigeria, Philippines, Portugal, Thailand, and U.S.A.

What Else Does IEA Do?

In addition to publishing international comparisons for each completed study, IEA provides bulletins on topics raised during IEA research, a semi-annual newsletter, and a guidebook containing information about the IEA international research network found among member countries.

Periodically, IEA sponsors conferences on issue-related topics and the organization carries out secondary analysis on its own data sets comparing trends over studies and more generally mapping school outcomes worldwide. For more information about IEA, write to:

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Additional Reading

Burnstein, L., ed. (forthcoming). *The Second International Mathematics Study: Volume III*; Oxford, England: Pergamon Press.

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This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education under contract number R-88-062003. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI or the Department of Education. ***Permission is granted to copy and distribute this ERIC/TM Digest.***